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THE NEW ENGLAND

BY SYDNEY BROOKS

[It was the purpose of THE REVIEW to publish this article by Mr. Brooks in the October issue. The first draft of the MS., however, went down on the *Hesperian*, when that vessel was destroyed September 4.—THE EDITOR.]

ONE may fairly hope that from this war Great Britain will emerge a democracy. I do not mean in its forms and institutions and the machinery by which public opinion makes itself known and operative. These are the mere appurtenances of democracy, and not its essence. Politically and in spite of some anomalous arrangements, one of which, the House of Lords, is conspicuously oligarchical, we in Great Britain have long enjoyed a somewhat fuller and more effective measure of self-government than perhaps any other people in the world. We were tinkering with the Constitution and meditating plans for an elective Upper Chamber before the war began, but I doubt whether we shall have much heart for such pursuits when it is over. It is true the Irish question will remain to be dealt with, and steps may be taken to sweep away some of the ridiculous complexities of our electoral system, to admit women to the suffrage, and in other ways to ease and simplify the working of the representative régime. But it is not of such expedients I am thinking when I anticipate, as one of the results of the war, a great influx of democracy throughout Great Britain. To readjust the framework of Government is to effect little of permanent value. After innumerable experiments most peoples have more or less settled the question of what institutions they are to live under, only to find they have settled nothing at all. In countries such as Prussia and her still vaster neighbor to the east, where the people are still far from being the Government, a severe internal struggle may have to be fought out before democracy comes into its own. But hardly anywhere, and least of all in England, is political reform and

enfranchisement now looked upon, as a few generations ago it was exclusively looked upon, as an end in itself. The masculine world has outgrown the stupendous fallacy that the ballot and the millennium are one and the same; and the feminine world has only to be given the vote to outgrow it, too. Whatever the war may elsewhere lead to in the shape of dynastic revolutions, redistributions of sovereignty, and political transformations and upheavals, Great Britain on the whole seems likely to maintain her familiar scheme of things outwardly intact or only slightly modified.

Inwardly, however, there must persist for some years to come a great change of attitude towards political men and methods. The war has revealed Great Britain on both the best and the worst sides of her national character and her national system—more than three million men, on the one hand, voluntarily enrolling themselves in the Army of Liberty, and, on the other, strikes and discontent in the most vital industries, muddle and waste in high quarters, and a depressing average of administrative capacity and political courage and leadership. The cohesion and the unanimity of selfless devotion which Germany has displayed throughout her titanic effort are as much beyond our present British reach as are the intelligence and foresight with which she has marshalled and turned to account all her resources of human and material energy. I cannot pretend as an Englishman to be blind to the fact that if we fail in this struggle it is because we deserve to fail, because our patriotism is neither so intensive nor so extensive nor so fruitful as that of our antagonist, because our sense of the State is feebler and our discipline less firm, because we bring to this business of war qualities of mind and spirit that are better suited to the careless, slouchy days of peace.

One defect, in particular, has been mercilessly exposed—the inadequacies of the party system as an instrument of war. It completely broke down, and its place was taken by the present Coalition Cabinet. But the new Ministry, even after four months of trial, has still to justify itself and to gain the full confidence of the country. The national temper still runs far ahead of the official policies. But though causes for dissatisfaction abound, nobody dreams of reverting to the party system of government. More strength, more resolution, more leadership—these are what the country is clamoring for. "Politics" have become not merely meaningless

but noxious to the average man. He sickens at the very thought of them, and so long as the war lasts, he is not in the least likely to overcome his repulsion. Even, however, when it is over there will be a prolonged and infinitely difficult work of salvage and reconstruction to be grappled with. Few people imagine that the old type of party politician will be either competent or permitted to undertake it. If there are still men at Westminster who dream, when the war is out of the way, of reviving their little feuds, their preposterously trivial manœuvres, I am persuaded that they utterly misread the times. A decade or two from now we may again have parties in Britain. Meanwhile, in my judgment, we are heading straight if not for a dictatorship, at least for some sort of Committee of Public Safety with all but absolute powers. It is not merely that the nation is disenchanted with and revolts from the politicians and their party game. It is also that it feels itself unable to afford the waste involved in it. In the arduous and straitened years that lie before us the very best brains that the country possesses will be none too good for the rebuilding of the national life out of the wreckage of the war. And whatever the virtues of the party system, it always and necessarily fails to utilize more than half of the available talents and experience. I conceive, then, that in some form or other the Coalition type of government, compressed into a very few hands and strongly reinforced by advice and assistance of the business men of the country, even if they do not happen to possess seats in Parliament, must of necessity survive the war and continue for many years to wrestle with its huge aftermath of problems.

It is, however, in the social and not the political sphere that the most sweeping and at the same time the most wholesome changes may be anticipated. The political unity of the nation, induced by the outbreak of the war and confirmed by all that has happened since, found at once a far more momentous counterpart in a social unity. One of the compensations, one of the very few compensations of war, is its virtue as a purgative of self. It has visibly in the past twelve months drawn all classes closer together, and evoked a spirit of genuine fraternity. Beneath the compulsion of a common affliction rich and poor have realized that they are all alike Britons, and bound as such to stand together and help one another and the nation through the storm. We were not a social democracy before the war. We are well on the way to becom-

ing one now. We shall be one before the long-distant peace is concluded. Already, as I have said, some three million of our best men, drawn from every occupation and every rank in life, have mingled with one another, have learned to understand and sympathize with one another, in the new Armies. Another three millions may yet have to be added to them. And this great force of hard, clean men, with all the nonsense of social distinctions knocked out of them, trained into an equal brotherhood in the severest school of courage, efficiency and sacrifice, is the backbone of Britain during the war and will continue, one may fairly hope, to be its backbone through the not less anxious decades of peace. The war has fused us, as nothing else could have done, into one people. Gone is the vicious consideration that wealth has always claimed and received in the plump security of these islands. Duke's son and cook's son are fighting shoulder to shoulder; great ladies slave like barmaids at refreshment buffets, like sewing-maids in the Red Cross arsenals, like factory hands in the munitions works; a shopwalker and a grocer's assistant wear the V. C.—the new patent of nobility; for the convalescent wounded there is a boundless outpouring of hospitality and affection, free from the remotest tinge of "condescension"; the impulse to succor, to link hands, to know and understand one another, is universal. I am persuaded that in the sterner days succeeding the war this impulse will not pass away.

For England, thank God, henceforward and for many generations is to be a poor land, a land of labor and not of leisure, an England such as no living man has ever known. It is part, I suppose, of the inevitable madness of war that many Englishmen should sincerely have persuaded themselves that Germany, after four decades of unity, power and prosperity—after four decades, that is to say, of the conditions which England has enjoyed for nearly two centuries—had grown degenerate, that the national fibre had relaxed, and that they were entitled to weep over the submergence of the simple habits and the disinterested ideals of the Germany their fathers knew. But if any country in Europe had become enervated by luxury and pursued pleasure and comfort with a disproportionate ardor that country surely was England. The whole scheme of British existence made for easygoingness. You had an old, a wealthy, a deeply-rutted aristocracy which, while not idle, was too magnificent and too softly circumstanced to take off its coat in earnest. You had a vast

territorial class living to perfection the life of private and privileged ease, broken, if at all, by a little public activity—a seat on the magistrate's bench, on the local council, perhaps in Parliament. The English "country gentleman" of the old type before the war had, no doubt, his immense utility. But at the same time it was equally indisputable that the sort of life he affected, and especially the sort of life affected by the newer and richer class of country gentlemen—the endless indulgence in sport, the salmon stream, the grouse moor, the hunting box, the pheasant preserve, and so on—was, on the whole, one of more or less innocuous and half-irresponsible idleness.

Again, in an old and stable land, governed by a monarchy, and with social standards as fixed as the social foundations, the conventions played an enormous part; and the conventions in England were all against hard work. It was the leisured class that ruled, that made up society, that held all the positions men naturally covet. Time and again have I been assured by Americans, Canadians and Australians that what most impressed them in that England which has been killed by the war was the prevalence of the caste system. They were quite right. The caste system was beyond doubt the outstanding feature of the British structure. It was the caste system that made the West End of London the governing centre of the Empire. It was the caste system that in every British Ministry reserved an excessive number of places for the aristocracy, whose title to them was based mainly on the non-essentials of birth, manners, and social position. Nobody pretended that they were the best men for the offices they filled or that the country received from them anything like full value for its money. They were there chiefly because they were born in the purple and could not be got rid of. Hence politics in England remained an affair of friends, and the national business, as the war has shown but too clearly, was too often entrusted to a set of charming, wealthy, and condescending amateurs. But it was socially and industrially rather than politically that the caste system worked its gravest harm. What was it at bottom that made the English atmosphere before the war so difficult for an American to breathe in freely? It was, I believe, that he felt himself in a country where the dignity of life was lower than in his own; a country where a man born in ordinary circumstances expected, and was expected, to die in ordinary cir-

cumstances; where the scope of his efforts was traced beforehand by the accident of position; where he was handicapped in all cases and crushed in most by the superincumbent weight of convention, "good form," and the deadening artificialities and traditions of an old society. That unconquerable buoyancy which infects the American air like a sting and challenge, and braces every American with the inspiration that he has a chance in life; that here are open opportunities, unreserved possibilities, no battering at locked doors, no floundering down blind alleys; that here, in short, it is the man himself who makes his career—is something which England before the war had so disastrously lost as to be hardly capable of realizing it. The number of things that an English "gentleman" and still more an English "lady" could not do without losing social caste was so prodigious as to form almost a schedule of forbidden industries. There were some trades and professions and occupations that were "respectable" and others which were not. Only an Englishman knew which was which; and he knew it by an instinct which was born in him, which he never examined and so could not define. These factitious and conventional gradations exist, of course, to some extent everywhere, but nowhere were they so stereotyped, nowhere did they strike so deeply, as in antebellum England. There was not a single Englishman who had not the social privilege of despising some other Englishman, and the lower one penetrated in the social scale the more complex and mysterious and the more rigidly drawn did these lines of demarcation become.

The truth is that throughout England the sense of the nobility of work for its own sake, if not actually lost, had been weakened and confused by the intrusion of quite alien factors. The country, while democratic in form, was not democratic in spirit. It had not accepted, and did not subscribe to, that gospel of work which lies at the root of the strength, the success, the democracy, of the younger nations. The working-man, aping the class above him and imbued with the same spirit that gave all the conventions a "ca'-cannie" twist, was not likely to gain a keen appreciation of the dignity of labor. His ideal inevitably became that of doing as little as he could, of striving to reproduce on his own plane his employer's mode of life, and of regarding work as an unpalatable interruption of the real business of existence.

There were two perils that menaced England before the

war, and menace her still, more formidably than any fleet of German dreadnoughts; and both of them lay within herself. Even now, when our national life is at the hazard of war, it is hardly too much to say that England's deadliest and most enduring enemy is ignorance, mental inertia, slipshod ways of thinking and acting, a depressed average of intelligence, a preference for casual improvisations and rule-of-thumb methods over scientific forethought and organization. In the world-wide struggle for trade, a struggle that has long tended to assume the character of a contest between highly-trained experts, we in Great Britain, when the war broke out, were only just beginning to value knowledge and to devise the means of getting it. And reinforcing this defect, partly the cause of it, and partly its product, were those other shortcomings on which I have touched—that excessive worship of externals and appearances, that over-valuation of the purely decorative, non-productive elements of life, that eternal sacrifice of efficiency to “good form” and flunkeyism. The standards of British life were fixed too little by fundamental values and too much by adventitious accessories. There was at work a pernicious and permeating spirit of distortion and misdirection. Faced with the spectacle of all the wretched huckstering and intrigue that graduate the scale of English precedence; bogged in the belief that not character but position is the important thing and that the worth of life is something different and separate from the work of labor; and neglecting the things that matter and bestowing an inordinate attention on what Burke called the “solemn plausibilities” of life—the British nation did not and could not realize its best self.

Upon this altogether too comfortable and too complacent community, taking things easily in its familiar, unconcerned way, there burst the shock of war. The manhood of the nation rose with a stern impetuosity to meet its ordeal. No voluntary system in the history of the world ever produced so great a response from such a variety of ranks and occupations. Two classes in particular flung themselves into the recruiting offices—the wage-earners and the men of leisure. It is retracting not a word of what I have said as to the unwholesome influence of the wealthy irresponsibles as a body to insist that as individuals they have proved true grit. The gentlemen of England have more than upheld, they have positively enhanced, their ancient fame. As for the working

men who have rushed into the Army in embarrassing multitudes, there is to be gathered one clear and predominant impression from all the letters that are written at the front, from all the talk of the officers and men on leave or in hospital: the affection, the implicit confidence, the unstinted admiration that exist between the leaders and the rank and file. Get hold of an officer and he will talk of nothing but his men. Get hold of the men and they will tell you little except what first-class fellows their officers are. We cannot measure the liberation of the spirit, the quickening of the imagination, the knowledge of self and others, the fraternal bonds, the lessons of order and discipline, the readjustment of all social values that are the fruit of this war not only for the British Army but for the British nation. The foundations of all things are shifting even if they are not breaking; habits and prejudices and old instinctive attitudes of mind are in process of dissolution; economic conditions that seemed rooted in the deeps are made plastic and adjustable; and from this welter of renewal there will emerge a Britain dignified by enormous sacrifices, enobled by poverty, and embracing, with an ardor that will burn a path through a host of seemingly insoluble problems, the true faith of social equality.

One thing in especial that the war must infallibly revolutionize is the ordinary Englishman's conception of the State and his duties and responsibilities towards it, and of the range of its functions. In the past fifteen months the State has entered the homes of our people in a quite new guise. The National Register Act illustrates the difference. When it was put into operation the State appeared before the nation not promising "nine pence for four pence" or any ingratiatingly deceptive errand of that sort. It appeared with the single purpose of asking every individual between fifteen and sixty-five such questions as these: "Who are you? What is your age? What are your circumstances and occupation? Above all, what are you doing and what can you do for your country?" This last query, was, of course, the vital and startling one. It struck home by its very unexpectedness. So long as any of us in Great Britain can remember we have been harangued about the duty of the State to the people. Now, almost for the first time, the People were being asked about their duty to the State and their capacity to fulfill it. We have been encouraged to think of the State as a superior policeman, a handy milch-cow, an unaccountable Santa

Claus. But when the National Register Act came into force the tables were turned. The State then said, "In happier times I have done much for you. What can you do for me in my hour of need and peril?" We can all see now that in the past we English have grievously failed to associate the State with the ideas of personal service, personal obligation, personal self-sacrifice. We have failed, in other words, to teach the first elements of citizenship. Far too many of our people are born and grow to manhood without once realizing that they are members of a community, and that between themselves and that community there might one day arise a question of debts to be paid and duties to be discharged. They have been used to getting all they can and giving nothing in return, because nothing has been asked of them. As a result we are the least organized nation in Europe, and the one where the sense of the State, and of the demands it may legitimately enforce and of the obligations owing to it from all who live under its protection, is least developed. When the State, therefore, armed with the National Register Act, held a national roll-call, made an inventory and valuation of the man-power and woman-power of the country, and enumerated every contribution, even the smallest, on which it could rely in its supreme fight for existence, something like a turning-point was reached in the political philosophy of the British people. We are never likely to go to the extreme of Germany and deify the State as an authority, not merely supreme over all the individuals who compose it, but with attributes and a code of ethics distinctively its own. We are far too humorous and far too rebellious a people for that. But unquestionably the war will leave behind it a much clearer realization by each individual Englishman that he is only part of a greater whole: that the State has a claim upon him that exceeds the exigencies of his private interests, and that patriotism to be productive must be linked with service and sacrifice.

Along with this change in the attitude of the ordinary citizen towards the State, there is certain to proceed an even wider expansion of State activities. All the belligerents have found it necessary to utilize the full powers of their national organization; but nowhere has this development seemed so much of a revolution as in Great Britain, because nowhere was political opinion so ruled by a happy-go-lucky individualism. If the old politics are dead, so also are the old eco-

nomics. Since the war began we have seen the State invading that inviolable stronghold, the Englishman's castle, his home, and incontinently converting it into a billet for soldiers. We have seen it taking over the railways and running them for the common weal. We have seen it fixing wages, regulating prices, and proceeding with British severity against forestallers. We have seen it purchasing huge supplies of sugar and meat for re-sale to private dealers with a very definite understanding as to the profits they may reap. We have seen it controlling the Press, and sharply restricting liberty of speech. We have seen it entering the insurance business, inaugurating new industries, setting up national workshops for the production of munitions of war, abolishing trade-union rules and privileges, annexing practically the entire engineering trade of the country and turning its surplus profits into the Treasury, and assuming full authority to close any saloons it thinks fit. And all these ventures have been approved and applauded by the British people simply because they were demanded by the common-sense of the situation. That the future must witness a yet greater extension of Governmental ownership and control seems to me beyond question. The fetish of property is dead or dying. I cannot imagine the railways slipping back into private hands or individual ownership, and operation of the services and utilities that are indispensable to the life of the community being allowed to continue its old haphazard course for any length of time when peace returns.

The land question in particular, to which almost every other question in Great Britain ultimately comes back, is insoluble without the drastic intervention of the State. How to repeople the countryside is one of the earliest and most anxious problems we shall have to face. The war has disclosed many flaws in our economic situation, but none more serious from the physical, the financial and the political standpoints than our unique dependence upon foreign countries for our supply of food—a dependence that, with the development of the submarine, must sooner or later threaten our very existence as a nation. A century ago we had seven times as many acres under wheat for every hundred of the population as we have to-day, and we raised nearly six times as many bushels per head. After every war there is a back-to-the-land movement. After this war it will be a rush. How to meet that rush, how to settle ex-soldiers on the land and

provide them with capital, expert instruction, and the machinery of co-operation, and how to lessen the enormous dislocation of labor that must follow "when peace sets in with unusual severity" by systematic schemes of colonization throughout the British overseas Dominions—these are problems that only the State can effectively tackle. With what means it will tackle them, when our margin of revenue for many years to come, after paying the interest on the national debt, will be all but a minus quantity, is more than I can say. But that somehow or other they will be tackled, and that the process will absolutely subvert the settled plan of British rural existence, and the familiar British notions as to the sanctity of property, is a moderately safe anticipation. We shall have to pool all our resources and "Socialize" many of our productive agencies to keep going at all; and not a single scheme, not a single hint, can be neglected that will help us to cut our coat according to our much attenuated cloth. We shall have to look upon the country as a co-operative estate to be managed and developed for the benefit of all who live in it. We shall have to dismiss merely political problems and concentrate on life and the means of subsistence and what Carlyle used to call "the condition of the people" question. And with every penny we can save we shall have to do as the Germans did when they began to escape from beneath the heel of Napoleon—we shall have to educate our people, to rescue the schools from the theologians and the politicians, and to open up a road from the primary school to the university firm enough and broad enough to be traversed by the multitudes whose gifts and capacities are at present either wasted or unrevealed.

The temper in which Labor will emerge from this conflict is one of the gravest questions ahead of us. Even the war has not been able to conceal the bitterness and the suspicions that were leading British industrialism to a violent crisis that, but for its outbreak, could not have been long delayed. Labor at present has the whip hand of Capital. It can command its own price and make pretty well what terms it likes. But I am filled with apprehensions that when the situation is reversed, and the labor market is flooded with disbanded soldiers, the employer will seize his chance to reassert his supremacy, and that the old dreary tale of strikes and lock-outs, of broken agreements, and miserable alienations and misunderstandings, will be resumed. There are, however,

some omens of a happier issue. One is the practical certainty that in many of the most vital industries the State will take the place of the private owner. Another is the absolute certainty that we shall all be condemned to lives of the severest economy, that the rich will be decidedly poorer, and the poor, in all probability, decidedly richer relatively to their present means than they are to-day, and that the war by forcing a general redistribution of wealth and lowering the standard of living for all classes, but particularly for the well-to-do, will have materially eased the social friction. Then, again, I count on the influence of the returned soldiers as a steadying factor. But even so I see little prospect of British industrialism weathering the difficult years of peace without a whole series of internal conflicts unless employers take the lead in humanizing their relations with their men.

This, however, is a matter in which the fixed data are so few and the exceptions and qualifications so many and so varied that no forecast can be much more than a speculation in the unknowable. As much, too, may be said for the military and naval arrangements of Great Britain after the war. They will depend so largely on the character of the peace and the responsibilities it entails as to be outside the scope of any useful discussion at the present moment. But there is one great social and political change which may already be said to be foreordained. The war has done more for women than they could ever have done for themselves, and their full political and industrial and professional emancipation in England will prove, I imagine, to be one of its first and best consequences. There were people before the war who said that women could not vote because they could not fight. We all know better now. We all know that you cannot wage war without the help of women, and that their zeal and self-sacrifice and their organizing talents are an essential part of a modern nation's military strength. In the new Britain that is now being hammered out—a Britain intolerant of party politics, socially remade, pivoting upon its citizen soldiery, living sanely and thriftily, bent upon turning to the utmost account all its assets and resources, and exalted by the memory of heroic struggles and sacrifices—in this new Britain I feel confident that women will share more and more in the opportunities and responsibilities of men.

SYDNEY BROOKS.